

Keynote Address of Prof. Dr. Satya Vrat Shastri at the Colloquium

On

ORIENTALISM AND ITS IMPACT ON SANSKRIT STUDIES

Satya Vrat Shastri

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I deem it a great privilege to be with you this forenoon and share some of my thoughts on the interesting and important topic of Orientalism and its impact on Sanskrit studies. Before I come to the topic proper, I would like to reflect for a while on the orientalism which derives itself from the word orient which means countries to the east of the Mediterranean, especially the countries of Asia. Occident and orient are relative terms. To the people of the Occident, the Europeans, the people of Asia that includes our own country India, are orientals. They are to their east. It looks incongruous to find Indians calling themselves oriental and using the term to designate all that belongs to them. We have the use of this word in the names of some of our very prestigious institutions like the Govt. Oriental Manuscript Library, Chennai, Oriental Research Institute, Mysore, Oriental Institute, Vadodara, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, here in Pune itself. It also figures in the name of the Conference called the All India Oriental Conference. Indology is a better term in place of Orientology.

Orientalism in the theme of the Colloquium may be interpreted to mean the Western System as it came to be introduced in India in the wake of the coming in of the British who had their own world view with which they looked at things they came into contact with.

When two systems meet it is inevitable that they should impact each other. The degree of impact varies with the identity of the systems, whose system it is. If it is that of the conquerors, the subjugators, it would hold its sway over the that of the subjugated. The very fact that the people holding on to theirs came to be subjugated come to accord in their view less importance to it. They overawed by the superior might of the subjugators, allow to have their system an upper hand. And this precisely what happened in India during the past two centuries or so.

For thousands of years Sanskrit was pursued in Pathashalas, Gurukulas, Tols and Vidyalayas which were more patronized by private initiative than the State one. The funding for them came from society, the more affluent members of it, who were philanthropically inclined. These institutions which in primary stage were either single teacher units and at higher level had but a couple of teachers dotted the entire landscape of India. It is through them that the fountain of

knowledge flowed and irrigated the minds of countless millions throughout the length and breadth of the vast stretches of this sprawling country.

Sanskrit teaching in them meant primarily the teaching of the old texts, line by line, unraveling their meanings. The teacher who had learnt them from his teacher through hard labour would put in an equal amount of hard labour to interpret these to his pupils who had to follow a rigorous routine. The more proficient one would be in comprehending the text line by line the more scholarly would he be taken. That was the panktipāndita. To achieve it was the desired aim.

In the Vaidika Pathashalas the alumni were expected to commit to memory the whole texts according to prescribed rules even the slightest deviation from them being frowned upon. In the primary stages the basic texts like the Astādhyāyi and the Amarakosa were assiduously committed to memory. The idea was to exercise full control over vocabulary and the grammatical correctness of speech. A very popular saying in traditional Sanskrit circles was, and still is : astādhyāyi jaganmata 'marakoso jagatpita, "Astādhyāyi is the mother of the universe and Amarakosa is the father of the same. If one has cultivated both, one's success in life is assured.

Disquisitions or the Sastras were the norm in those days and the Vidvatsadas-s where they were carried on were the vogue. It may be interesting to note here that till recently in U.P. and Bihar in Brahmin marriages when the groom's party would arrive at the brides' place, there would be Sastrartha between the priests of the two parties the result of which was keenly watched by all those present.

With the coming in of the British a new system of schools and colleges came to be introduced where Sanskrit came to be reduced to one of the subjects among many. Obviously the number of texts to be studied had to suffer reduction, the more abstruse and abstract of them being completely sidelined, that coming to be the sole preserve of the traditional Pundits, a fast diminishing fraternity with the existing traditional Sanskrit institutions also inserting in their curricula modern subjects in keeping with the demands of the age which would not accept a unilinear approach. Though through the introduction of Honours course at the graduate level and specialization at the post-graduate level an effort was made to remedy the situation, it was not enough to lift up the Sanskrit learning to the level of profundity which is the hall mark of traditional one. With schools having no Sastric learning how much Hons. and Master's courses would have of the Sastras? Moreover, the approach was different. In the modern system, it was more varied, along with the textual content much about the text, its authorship, its date, impact on it on earlier texts or of it on later ones, to impinge on the time possible of devoting to mastery of it line by line going by the name of uncritical approach, the former appropriating to itself the more exalted position of the critical one.

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Here I may like to take a break and recount a personal anecdote that may throw light on the difference in approach in the two systems, western and the traditional Indian. I am a product of the both the systems, traditional and modern. My teacher from I studied the *Vākyapadiya* was a Professor at the Govt. Sanskrit College, Varanasi. The place of his stay and that of mine were very close to each other. I would accompany him every morning to the College. On the way we would discuss many things. One day I asked him as to what he thought about the authorship of the *Nighantu* which was the text which the famous Yāska had expounded in his *Nirukta*. I spoke to him about the three different theories in this connection. According to one Dakṣa Prajāpati was its author, according to the other, it was Yaska himself and according to the third it were the early scholars, the Purvācaryas. My teacher told me that he has not given any thought to it. He is more concerned with what is in the *Nighantu* rather than what is about it. That sums up the attitude of the traditional Pandits about the old texts and that is more eloquent than anything else in highlighting the difference in approach.

Quite a few of the old Sanskrit texts have a large number of known commentaries, the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* eleven, the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa six, the *Yogavāsistha* thirteen (including twelve still in manuscript), the Kāvyaaprakāśa fourteen (that are published; reportedly many more) but none of them engages itself with the question of the date and the authorship of these works. There is nothing in the old commentaries about the Bālakānda and the Uttarākānda being later additions to the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, a question discussed by scholars, both Indian and Western, extensively. The date of the *Yogavāsistha* still hovers anywhere between 6th cen. A.D. to the first half of the 10th cen. A.D. with each scholar pushing his own set of arguments for or against one view or the other.

Summary

Orient has always been a mystery to the Occident. To unravel it, to have a peep into its past and present has been a passion with it. That is why even the Jesuit priests who have been visiting India prior to the coming in of the East India Company or people of other persuasions have been interested in discovering for themselves the ancient wisdom of India. That accounts for their interest in Indian works that were in manuscript at that time. They collected them and brought them along to their countries on getting back. Later they gave them to some institutions therein. That is how big collections of them came to be built up in countries of Europe over the years. Of these manuscripts a good number of them were in Sanskrit.

151

With the coming in of the British the process got a fillip. All this resulted in sizeable collections of manuscripts in such institutions as Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, the India Office Library, London, the British Museum, London, the Bodleian Library, Oxford, the Cambridge University Library, Cambridge and the libraries of the Indological Institutes, the Seminars für Indologie of Goettingen, Tübingen, Münich, the Staat Bibliothek, Berlin and so on of Germany

(The British East India Company took up the work of collection of manuscripts in a systematic manner. For each region it appointed manuscript surveyors. The prominent ones for the eastern region that comprised the Bengal Presidency and included Bihar, Bengal, Orissa and Assam were Rajendra Lal Mitra and Har Prasad Shastri. For the western region were Peterson, G. Buhler, Kielhorn and R.G. Bhandarkar, for the southern region were K. Pisharody, T. Ganapati Sastry and Vasudevan Pillai, for the northern region, particularly for Varanasi, were Arthur Venice, Vindhyaeshwari Prasad Dwivedi, Gopinath Kaviraj and so on.)

(The total number of Sanskrit manuscripts in various collections all through the country is upward of three million.

The eagerness for search for manuscripts led to such initiatives as the expedition to Gobi desert under the leadership of Sir Aurel Stein. The expedition known as the Turfan Expedition led to the discovery of a large number of important manuscripts. Called after Stein, the Stein Collection, they are now with the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest. The collection was catalogued in eight volumes under the title Sanskrit Handschriften Aus den Turfan. A similar initiative led to the expedition to Gilgit and an important find of manuscripts from there called the Gilgit Manuscripts. The first lot of these was discovered by Sir Aurel Stein and the second by Madhusudan Kaul. The second one is now with the National Archives, Srinagar.

Indigenous effort in collection and preservation of manuscripts prior to the contact with the west owes itself in part to the initiative of the local rulers. The Anup Library at Bikaner, the Maharaja's Library called Pothikhana earlier, at Alwar which is now with the Prachya Pratishthan, Raja Man Singh Pustak Prakash at Jodhpur, the Pothikhana at Jaipur, the T.S.S.M. Library at Tanjore the Maharaja's Library at Travancore which is now with the Oriental Manuscript Library and Research Department, Kerala University, Kariavattom Campus, Thiruanathapuram are the contributions of the enlightened rulers of the time. In another part the effort owes itself to certain communities like the Jains who built big collections of Jain manuscripts, called the Bhāndāgāras mainly in Gujarat. During the British times the manuscripts were also preserved in the libraries of the Oriental Colleges and the Oriental Libraries like the Govt. Oriental Manuscript Library, Madras set up at that time.

(The need was felt to catalogue all these collections both in India and abroad. Apart from the individual catalogues brought out by the respective institutions comprehensive ones were also undertaken like the Sanskrit Handschriften um Deutchland, the Sanskrit Manuscripts of Germany, in twelve volumes, the Catalogus Catalogorum of Aufrecht and the New Catalogus Catalogorum initiated by V. Raghavan and currently in progress at the University of Madras, Chennai, forty one volumes of which have so far been issued.
Liberally abridged.

The biggest collection of Sanskrit manuscripts is with the Sarasvati Bhavan Library of the Sampurnanand Sanskrit Vishvavidyalaya, Varanasi. It has one lakh and twenty-five thousand catalogued manuscripts. Besides these there are thirty thousand uncatalogued manuscripts in Oriya script discovered from Orissa which are one part of the find from there, the other part being with the State Museum, Bhubaneswar.

The splurge for search for Sanskrit manuscripts generated by western scholars led to the discovery sometimes of rare finds in India and abroad. The plays that Bana refers to in his *Kādambarī* with their special characteristics and which are frequently quoted in works on rhetorics and whose author Bhāsa finds a reverential mention from such a celebrity as Kālidāsa in his *Mālavikāgnimitra* were discovered by T. Ganapati Sastri from a chance recovery in the course of his search of manuscripts of a palm-leaf codex in Malayalam which contained ten of the now well-known of thirteen of them as also one, later identified as *Dūtavākyā* in a mutilated state. The search continuing, he was able to lay his hands on more manuscripts of them thus completing the full picture of the thirteen plays. Another equally great find was the Paippālada recension of the Atharvaveda by Durgamohan Bhattacharya from Orissa two small tracts from which he published from the Asiatic Society, Kolkata. The full text of it was later brought out by his illustrious son Deepak Bhattacharya.

The next step to the procurement and preservation of the manuscripts was their publication. Scholars thought to bring out in print as many of them as possible. With this started a series of publications, some of the more prominent of them being the Sacred Books of the East Series which Max Muller edited, the Kavyamala Sanskrit Series, the Gaekwad Oriental Series, the Trivandrum Sanskrit Series. The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series with their off-shoots of Benaras Sanskrit Series and Kashi Sanskrit Series, the Anandashram Sanskrit Series, the Calcutta Govt. Sanskrit College Series, the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute Series and so on. Some of the works appearing in these series were critically edited, some were not. Some works like the *Padamañjanī* of Haradatta and the *Sabdakaustubha* of Bhattojidiksita were published serially in the Sanskrit magazines the *Samskrtaçandrikā* and the *Sūrtavādī* being brought out in the mid-nineteenth century, around 1850 or so from Varanasi.

Critically ^{editing} and constituting the text of a work was the greatest contribution of western scholars. Their Indian counterparts assimilated the methodology adopted by them which led to the appearance of such monumental works as the critical editions of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana* by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune and the Oriental Institute, Baroda respectively. Along the same lines is being brought out the critical edition of the Purāṇas by the All India Kashiraj Trust, Varanasi. }

The other area wherein the Western scholarship created its impact was the preparation of dictionaries like the *Wörterbüch* by Roth and Bothlingk, the

Sanskrit-English Dictionary by M. Monier-Williams, the *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* by Vaman Shalivram Apte and the *Sanskrit Dictionary on Historical Principles* currently in progress at the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, Pune which in their character are altogether different from the old Sanskrit lexicons like the *Amarakosa* and the later works like the *Sabdakalpadruma* and the *Vācaspatya* as also Concordances, Indices, Encyclopaedias like the multi-volume *Vedic Word Concordance* of the Vishveshvaranand Vedic Research Institute, Hoshiarpur, *A Vedic Concordance* by Maurice Bloomfield, *Concordance of the Principal Upanisads and the Bhagavadgita* by G.A. Jacob, *A Concordance of Sanskrit Dhātupāthas* by G.B. Palsule and the Indices like the *Index to the Names of the Mahābhārata* by Sorenson, *Mahābhāratānāmānukramanika* from the Gita Press, Gorakhpur, *Upanisadvākyamahākosa* from the Gujarati Printing Press, Bombay, *Pāda Index* of the *Ramayana* by Harcharan, *Mahābhāratapratikasūci*, the *Pada Index of the Mahabharata*, forming the last volume of the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata* from Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, the *Word Index of the Mahābhārata*, in CD yet by Ramanujan, *Pada Index of the Sanskrit Kavyas* by Satya Pal Narang currently in progress, *Encyclopaedia of Vedānta* by Ram Murti Sharma, *Encyclopaedia of Hinduism* in progress in Hrishikesh and so on.. In line with the above is the appearance of the Bibliographies like the two Kalidasa Bibliographies, one by A.P. Mishra and the other by Satya Pal Narang, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* Bibliographies from the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi and the Indices of the verses in the poems, the plays, the tales and fables like the *Pāncatantra* and the *Hitopadesa* and the *Campus*. The texts on grammar now have indices of the *Sūtras*, *Vartikas*, *Dhūtus*, *Unādis* and *Paribhāsās* and so have the lexicons of words listed in them. The table of contents, the indices and the bibliography form part of almost all the critical works now, the theses for various University degrees included, in addition to carrying a detailed introduction discussing such problems as the date and the authorship of the work, other works of the author, the impact on him of his predecessors and his impact on his successors and his contribution to his field.]

[It was not always the altruistic consideration that drove western orientalists to the study of Sanskrit literature. Some of them, particularly the British ones among them, had a different motive. It is true that being foreign to Indian ethos they sometimes could not do full justice to it. Otherwise they would not have spoken of the *Vedas* as the 'songs of the shepherds' and *Sākuntalā* of the *Abhijñānasākuntala* as 'a rustic girl'.] Sir William Jones, a judge of the Supreme Court and the founder of the Royal Asiatic Society of Calcutta in 1784 whose Latin translation of the *Sākuntalā* first in 1787 and the word to word rendering of the same in English in 1789 had surprised Europe had started learning Sanskrit, as his biographer Lord Teignmouth testifies, to his desire to understand the culture of the land to rule as a perfect ruler true to his own Whig principles, yet in accordance with Indian law. His ambition was, as says his biographer, to translate only the Sanskrit legal treatise, the *Mānavadharmaśāstra*. Max Muller's first foray in Sanskrit literature was to have a better appreciation of the culture

and traditions of the natives to motivate them to Christianity. It is a different matter that the same scholar on realizing the depth and the profundity of the ancient Indian wisdom became its votary and came out with the collection of his lectures delivered to the I.C.S. probationers about to leave for India to govern under the title: India What it can Teach Us.

It was due to growing interest in Sanskrit that Chairs for Sanskrit/Oriental studies were set up in many foreign Universities either independently or part of South Asian studies or faculties of religious studies. In addition to providing Sanskrit teaching to students they evolved into important centers of Sanskrit learning where scholars distinguished themselves in study and analysis of Sanskrit classics. The past two hundred years or so have thrown up a long line of such scholars as have turned into legendary figures commanding instant respect and admiration. Some of them have become a byword for scholarship in a particular field like Max Muller in Vedic scholarship, Pargiter in Puranic scholarship, Jacobi in the Rāmāyanic scholarship, Franklin Edgerton in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit and so on.

In the Charter issued by the British Crown to the East India Company it was enjoined on the Company to look after education of its British subjects. In accordance with that the Company took upon itself to promote Sanskrit and Persian and Arabic education that was in vogue at that time. In pursuance of this aim it set up Sanskrit/Oriental Colleges in various parts of India some of which served later as the nucleus of the Universities that were to come up there. The first such College to be set up was the Govt. Sanskrit College, Varanasi in 1792, followed by the Govt. Sanskrit College and Govt. Madrassa at Calcutta in 1810, the Deccan College, Poona, earlier named Hindoo College in 1821 (it was renamed as Deccan College in 1864) and the Oriental College at Lahore in 1864 (from all available evidence it was coterminous with the setting up of the Govt. College there in that year). Besides these the Company also set up the Asiatic Societies, the Royal Asiatic Society, Calcutta, the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Bombay and the Royal Asiatic Society, London.

In 1830 the thinking developed that it would be better if the British subjects of India were taken away from their traditional learning and were taught English and other modern subjects. The greatest protagonists of this school were Macaulay and Raja Rammohan Roy, the latter vehemently opposing the continuation of the age-old system of education.)

When the Western scholars took to Sanskrit they had the clear advantage of having already equipped themselves with knowledge of Greek and Latin. They could, therefore, easily identify similarities between these languages and the ones grown out of them, the languages that they spoke; English French, German, Italian, Danish and so on and could relate them to a common source which they first gave the name of Proto-Indo-European. The languages of Europe and those of India having commonalities they first grouped under the umbrella term of 'family' that they first called as Indo-Germanic, the term later

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changed to Indo-European. This was to serve over a period of time to the birth of a science of Comparative Philology. The great German philologist Friedrich Schlegel was the founder of this science who asserted the common origin of Sanskrit and the principal European languages. The similarities observed in the myths of different nations after study of those of India led to the evolution of the science of Comparative Mythology. With this background when the Western scholars approached Sanskrit literature they brought to bear on its interpretation fresh light which not unoften appeared more appealing. An instance here would bear it out. In the mantra *gartārug iva sanaye dhanānām gartārug* had generally been interpreted by traditional interpreters as 'one going up the *garta*'; *gartam ārohati*. Now, it is a moot question as to how *ārohana*, climbing is to go with *garta*, which means a pit. It has to be *avarohana*, going down. But the moment *garta* is identified with English cart, the anomaly disappears. With cart it has to be *ārohana*, climbing.)

The Western scholars and the Indian ones who had the western education used the Sanskrit works in drawing the picture of India and its society in the times when they were written. *India as known to Pāṇini, Harsacarita—Ek Sāṃskṛtika Adhyayana* ((Harsacarita—A Cultural Study), *Patañjalikalīmba Bhāratavarsa* (India in the time of Patañjali) are works which on the basis of the evidence yielded by the respective works draw a picture of India and its society and culture in days of yore, the days when their authors wrote them. This became a norm for many a later study. The initiative for literary and linguistic analysis of old Sanskrit works also owes itself to the Western critical system of enquiry.

To be discovered XVII

It was due to the impact of western scholarship that historical evolution of Sanskrit literature was taken up as a line of enquiry. This needed the dating of the Sanskrit works requiring as it did massive effort on the part of a galaxy of scholars. There was a wide gap in the dating of the *Rgveda* which hovered anywhere between 2500 to 5000 B.C. Gap of several centuries which not unoften looked arbitrary was inserted between the various forms of the Vedic literature, the *Brahmanas*, the *Āranyakas* and the *Upanisads*. Controversies raged for decades about the chronology of the works and the authors; whether the *Rāmāyana* preceded the *Mahābhārata* or vice versa or whether *Āsvaghosa* preceded *Kālidāsa* or vice versa. Even in the works of the same author an order was sought, the *Ritusamhara* being taken to be earliest of the works of *Kālidāsa* and the *Sākuntalam* the last on the basis of the linguistic and stylistic considerations and on the same basis certain portion/s of the same work, as in the case of the *Rāmāyana* whose first and the last Books are taken to be later additions or in the case of the *Kumārasambhava* whose cantos from IX to XII are taken to be later additions. Massive efforts were also put in to identify through comparative and critical method the large number of interpolations in old Sanskrit texts.)

In a few words
It was due to the efforts of oriental scholars that histories of Sanskrit literature came to be written like the *A History of Sanskrit Literature* by A.B. Keith, A

